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TWELVE CLASSIC BOOKS on PREACHING

By Ronald L. Tyler

Through my work and research over the years, I have developed a profound appreciation for certain older books on the ministry of preaching. Many years ago, while serving as a minister and trying to become better informed about the tasks of ministry, I discovered several excellent older works on preaching. Later, while creating a course at Pepperdine University entitled "The Theology of Preaching," I was drawn again to those classic volumes. I have chosen twelve of them (several of which were originally from the famous Lyman Beecher Lectures on Preaching at Yale University) for discussion in this review.

These books have been selected for their appreciation of the high calling of the preacher and their emphasis on the why of the ministry; they can be of value in renewing the minister's spirit for the task of preaching. While their truths must be applied to a newer, different world, older books such as these rise above "chronological snobbery" (as C. S. Lewis called it)—the assumption that only recent books are of value.

Philipps Brooks, *Lectures on Preaching*, 1893. This material was the Yale Lectures on Preaching for 1877. Its value lies in its emphasis upon the place of the preacher's personality in the preaching moment. Brooks describes two central elements in preaching: truth and personality. He understood that "truth is mediated through personality," a learned emphasis that needs to be a permanent awareness for the minister's personal theology of preaching. In the book's eight chapters, Brooks discusses the preacher as a person, the preacher in his work, the concept of the sermon, the making of the sermon, the congregation's place in the sermon, the ministry for the world, and the value of the human person.

P. T. Forsyth, *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind*, 1907. Often reprinted, this book remains the finest work available on the theology of preaching. By "positive" preaching, Forsyth means preaching that has content. He was a prophetic person with a wealth of insight—insight that he was eager to share

through useful and extraordinary counsel, analysis, and suggestions. His work addresses many of the temptations and responsibilities of the serious biblical preacher. Karl Barth is said to have remarked that his own works were not needed in England because England had P. T. Forsyth. Forsyth knew better than anyone what biblical preaching was and should be.

A. T. Robertson, *The Glory of the Ministry: Paul's Exaltation in Preaching*, 1911. Robertson discovers Paul's view of ministry through a study of 2 Cor 2:12–6:10. This exegetical and expository study originated in both seminary classes and popular public lectures. Its eight chapters are characterized by several valuable features: (1) footnotes and quotations that guide the reader to other useful books; (2) helpful outlines of various pertinent passages in Paul's letters; and (3) revealing comments on Paul's theology of preaching, which lead the reader to renewed enthusiasm for the ministry.

J. H. Jowett, *The Preacher: His Life and Work*, 1912. Jowett was a



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prolific writer, and most of his books were an outgrowth of his preaching. This work was the Yale Lectures on Preaching for 1911. Its seven chapters cover the call, the perils, the themes, the study, the pulpit, the home, and the practical life of the preacher—a wealth of practical knowledge that is valid in any age.

A. J. Gossip, *In Christ's Stead*, 1925. This material was the Warrick Lectures on Preaching for 1925. Gossip believed that a minister could truly preach only when aware of his role as an ambassador for Christ. (It is interesting to note that Gossip wrote out his sermons after he preached them! Needless to say, he studied beforehand.) His material is organized into five chapters: the preacher in the modern world, the bases of preaching, the object of the sermon, the making of the sermon, and some signposts and danger signals. The counsel that Gossip offers in these five areas remains of value today.

Karl Barth, *Word of God and Word of Man*, 1928. Barth had a strong theology of the Word of God, and he viewed the preacher as having the Bible in one hand and the daily newspaper in the other. Chapter 1 of this work concerns the what of preaching. Chapters 2 and 3 affirm the centrality of the Bible in preaching. Chapters 4 and 6 remind us of why we preach; chapter 6 addresses what makes a sermon genuine or

believable. Chapter 7 places preaching in the context of the church gathered for worship. Chapters 5 and 8 concern preaching and the world. Barth, despite many excesses, understood the primary importance of the preaching event. The thoughtful minister can find a lifetime of reflective and exegetical material in Barth's many well-known volumes.

H. H. Farmer, *Servant of the Word*, 1942. This excellent book on preaching is second only to Forsyth's. In it, Farmer underscores the responsibility of both the preacher and the hearer in the preaching event. He emphasizes that speech is important and indispensable. After making a valid distinction between "good" preaching (which everyone likes) and "effective" preaching (which does God's will and work), Farmer asserts that effective preaching occurs when "both preacher and hearer clearly and deeply understand what is supposed to be happening when preaching is taking place and solemnly acknowledge their responsibility in and for it" (p. vi). Among the five chapters, chapter 3, "Preaching as Personal Encounter," is eminently practical for the preacher.

Paul Scherer, *For We Have This Treasure*, 1944. This work, the Yale Lectures on Preaching in 1943, is particularly striking in two aspects. First, while Scherer was completing the lectures (which had been deliv-

ered previously in various institutions), he was unable to speak for a period of time. Second, Scherer drew his framework entirely from words found in the Pauline tradition. Throughout the book, various Pauline passages form the major points of subdivision. Chapter 1 describes the preacher's task in the world. Chapter 2 describes the preacher as a human being. Chapter 3 sets forth the content and truth of the Christian gospel; chapter 4 affirms the application of that gospel to the world. Chapters 5 and 6 are more technical, addressing the sources of ideas for sermons as well as the process of organizing and writing the sermon. This book is a valuable resource for any preacher.

James Stewart, *Heralds of God*, 1946. This work was delivered as the Warrick Lectures on Preaching. Ray Summers, while chair of the Religion Department at Baylor University, called the book "one of the greatest books on preaching ever written." He was correct in his judgment. Stewart chose the title from Rom 10:14–15: "How are they to believe in One of whom they have not heard? And how are they ever to hear, without a herald? And how can men be heralds, unless they are sent by God?" Stewart writes, "I have chosen the title of this book to stress one fundamental fact, namely, that preaching exists, not for the propagating of views, opinions and ideals, but for the proclamation of the mighty acts of God." Stewart knew that the world in which we live is filled with tensions—and that the gospel is the victory. He declares that the work of the preacher is not wasted, that the preacher should persevere in preaching biblical doctrines and passages.

His chapters deal with the preacher's world, theme, study, technique, and inner life. The book serves as a source of encouragement for the preacher/minister. A second work by Stewart, *A Faith to Proclaim: The Content of Effective Preaching*, 1953, should also be mentioned. Given as the Yale Lectures on Preaching, this book is a companion to Heralds of God. Stewart argues here that preaching must stress five central themes: incarnation, forgiveness, the cross, resurrection, and the Christ. These two books, authored by such an influential and widely known preacher, have a timeless quality about them.

Donald G. Miller, *Fire in Thy Mouth*, 1954. This is an outstanding book on the theology of preaching. The title, taken from Jer 5:14, describes what Miller calls "preaching the Bible message of redemption." The first chapter, basic to the entire book, affirms that "preaching is not saying words but accomplishing a Deed: the actualization of redemption in the lives of men as the redeeming word is announced and

responded to in faith." Miller is strongly influenced by P. T. Forsyth in describing preaching as an event. Chapter 2 notes that the Bible is the record of God's redemptive deed. The Bible is the only valid source for true preaching. The next two chapters treat the difficulties and the values of biblical preaching. The final chapter studies the implications of biblical preaching for the church's life. This book speaks powerfully to the preacher and the future preacher, encouraging them to make biblical preaching the heart of their work. It will refresh the discouraged spirit and keep the zealous one at the task.

Donald G. Miller, *The Way to Biblical Preaching: How to Communicate the Gospel in Depth*, 1957. Offering a logical companion to his earlier *Fire in Thy Mouth*, Miller in this book stresses preaching the Bible and explains how to do it. Successive chapters answer questions such as, How does one study for preaching? How does one find the theme of a passage? How does one balance various aspects of truth within the sermon? How does one discover the

aim of a passage? and, How does one create the proper mood, or tone, of a given text? People seeking to discover—or to be strongly reminded of—the Bible's role in the ministry of preaching will be blessed by this passionate presentation.

John Knox, *The Integrity of Preaching: How Biblical Sermons Meet Modern Needs*, 1957. This remains a stimulating and powerful book, with its emphasis on the nature, relevance, and authenticity of biblical preaching. The question implied in the subtitle is answered throughout the book. True biblical preaching, for Knox, fulfills the need to continue the events of the first century in the twentieth century. Christ is the central event of the Bible; preaching Christ is what gives preaching integrity. The chapters of this book deserve careful reading and serious reflection. I gladly recommend these twelve classic books to the readers of *Leaven*. Happy reading and reflection!

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The Magnificat

*My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior
for he has looked with favor on
the lowliness of his servant.
Surely, from now on all generations
will call me blessed,
for the Mighty One has done
great things for me, and holy is his name.
His mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
according to the promise he made
to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.*

The Christ Hymn

*Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.
Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,
so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under earth,
and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord
to the glory of God the Father.*